

## Former Gladiator Hunter on how to keep fit after 40



James Crossley, AKA Hunter from Gladiators, has always known fitness is about adapting to your scenario. But for those looking for help on how to keep fit after 40, here's his advice on making the gym work for you



You may know James Crossley as Hunter, the blonde beefcake who thwarted the hopes of *Gladiators* contestants for seven years. Now, 47 years old and working as a strength and conditioning coach, he's no less intimidatingly built. But maintaining that muscle changes in your forties, he says, and there are things men need to know both at his age and beforehand to make sure you can keep it up.

Crossley is no stranger to changing up his workout routine to match the needs of the moment. Starting weightlifting at 12, by 19 he was a Junior Bodybuilding champion with 15 titles and had qualified for Junior Mr Universe. "I became obsessed with being Junior Mr Universe, plotting my route there by focusing on long and short-term goals," he said, "and this is how I got spotted for *Gladiators*, via a bodybuilding magazine."

However, *Gladiators* wasn't a bodybuilding contest: he had ten days between getting off the stage at bodybuilding events to becoming Hunter and they were completely different disciplines. "The events for me seemed impossible, having to climb walls and swing on rings. The producer approached me and pretty much said I was shit."

# GQ



Mortified, Crossley vowed to become better at the show's various challenges. “I began practising three times a week and devised a plan to mimic every event, from pushing cars for Atlaspheres to boxing with my feet tied together.” A year later, he was “a different beast”.

Between *Gladiators* – during which he dislocated his shoulder six times – and spending his thirties around the world of Strongman challenges and competitions, Crossley knows more than any how much damage you can do to yourself when you push yourself to extremes. But even the average gym-goer could be doing irreparable damage to themselves at the squat rack, which won't come to bite them in the glutes until they get a little older. Here's how he advises everyone get the most out of their workouts for the longest time possible.



## **1. Listen to your body when you're younger**

Warm up properly, add plenty of stretching and watch out for “ego lifting”. Stimulate, *not* annihilate.

Listen to the body for pains: knees, shoulders and wrists, for example, are complex joints that, as you age, take longer to heal, so if anything doesn't feel right, ice it and rest it before you make it worse. These take longer to heal on an older body.

As you age, cortisol is higher and stress can become an issue, so it's good to do some work on mindfulness. Find a form of meditation to suit you as it is important to relax the body and mind. I found gong baths really helped after struggling to settle with meditation.





## **2. Recovery is a priority**

Age isn't just a number: your body changes, recovery is harder, you're more prone to injuries, you become less flexible and it becomes harder to sleep. Also, hangovers become much worse – I virtually stopped drinking at 43. The body is in a very different place and you need to respect that and change your mindset. It was hard for me at first as I was a competitive athlete and I really had to work on the mental side of not being able to compete anymore.

It's all about growing older pain-free. I do weights only three days a week and three days of yoga. I rest much longer between workouts and prioritise mobility and flexibility.

I listen to my body more, looking out for any niggles, and my weights repetition range is six to 12 rather than doubles or singles. I work on prehabilitation, especially with the shoulder, so lots of warmups and specific exercises. I also make sure I sleep seven to eight hours a night and get as much recovery as possible.



### **3. It's not too late to start**

If you have never exercised you may start to notice lower-back pain, a weak core, shoulders rounding and you may struggle to tie your shoelaces. A combination of strength work and flexibility is great.

Full-body workouts are perfect, but also finding something you enjoy is key to making sure you stick with it. I had a client in his forties who hated weights; we had a long chat and we discovered he always fancied fencing. He's now a master fencing champion and fit as a fiddle. The enjoyment factor is a big part of it. For my father, walking has always been his thing since he turned 40. It has kept him in good shape and at the age of 82 he walked up Snowdon!

### **4. What to eat before and after exercise**

It all depends on your goals – muscle gain or fat loss? – and if you need a calorie surplus or deficit. As you age you cannot eat the same quantity of food you used to without adding pounds. A light meal 90 minutes before training is good – my go-to is scrambled eggs.

One hour post-workout you should have a nutritious meal, adding some lean protein, complex carbs and green vegetables. Protein shakes are great immediately post-workout if you're looking to add muscle. It's also important to keep the body alkaline, so eat lots of greens.



## **5. Be careful with high-impact workouts**

Impact on the knees and lower back might be an issue, so look out for any signs of discomfort and always be careful of jumps and aggressive movements. We always have one side stronger and less flexible than the other, which can cause issues such as hip and back pain, so unilateral exercises are an important addition for this age group.

A slower tempo of training is also very useful, so your eccentric movement of the weight should be three to four seconds. This is not only very productive but means less chance of injury.



## **6. It might be time to take up yoga**

Forty is still a great age to add muscle and change your shape – it really depends on the mentality of the individual. A complete beginner might be intimidated by gyms, whereas a seasoned, trained 40-year-old may thrive on them.

Although I have done yoga for years I took it up seriously six years ago. I was intimidated as I was so inflexible and I felt like I really stood out. I would be dripping with sweat after a class as I found it so hard. I'm now a teacher at the same place. The key, really, is consistency. The body will adapt quickly if you're consistent, so don't be intimidated and try to embrace the challenge and in turn the results.





## **7. Get the right kit**

I love weightlifting shoes such as Adidas lifters. They give such a solid base for your lifts and are snug. People can wobble around in ill-fitting trainers. A belt is important not for every lift but a good support for an ageing back.

## **8. Tracking your results**

If you have an untrained body you will have a six-month “golden period” where you generally see results more clearly. After that you have to add progressions to see decent changes. Short and long-term goals are important, otherwise it's easy to just to go through the motions with no real changes.

Depending on your goals it's good to add some testing every three weeks. This might be calliper measurements or photographing fat loss, flexibility tests, strength tests or tape measurements. SMART goals (**S**pecific, **M**easured, **A**ttainable, **R**elevant, **T**imed ) are a great way to stay focused and motivated.

Over 40 doesn't have to be a downward spiral, it's still a great age to make improvements to your body, mind and general health.